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One Class, Many Voices: Class of 2014 Brings an Enriching Diversity to the Law School

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One class, many voices

Class of 2014 brings an enriching diversity to the Law School

UB Law this year enrolls a smaller, slightly older, slightly more female incoming class – one whose median grade point average is almost one-tenth of a point higher than its predecessor class, and most especially, one with the signal strength of diversity.

Seventeen percent of the incoming members of the Class of 2014 are members of racial and ethnic minorities. Beyond those categories, the new students bring diversity in a whole range of other ways.

“With members ranging in age from 20 to 57, of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, and with a wide array of academic and life experience, the Class of 2014 is a group of people who look like America,” says Lillie Wiley-Upshaw, vice dean for admissions and financial aid. “We expect that diversity to serve them well in the classroom and to enrich the UB Law community in so many ways. These are smart, motivated and caring students who will find a natural fit with the school and, in just a few years, in the legal world.”

Meet just a few of the interesting newcomers to O’Brian Hall:

Peter D. Cantone’s father is a general-practice lawyer in Camillus, N.Y., near Syracuse. But Cantone “wanted to do my own thing,” he says, and became



an excellent trombone player and a music major at the State University of New York at Potsdam and at Rochester’s famed Eastman School of Music.

But as he continued to discern his life’s purpose, he found himself “getting a little frustrated with music because of a disconnect between what I was doing and other people. I always wanted to do something that would have an impact on other people, and I wasn’t finding that in music.” From his admission essay: “As a musician, many hours each day are spent in a private practice room, perfecting one’s craft. Ultimately, no matter how close I came to expressive authenticity, I felt unfulfilled.”

Having spent some time helping his father at his law office, “I got looking at what he does, how he helps people all the time. It was really exciting to me,” Cantone says. “There has always

been a big part of me that’s concerned about public issues and politics. It kind of came down to, I’d like to do this.”

“I’ve always been very passionate about civil rights and advocating for people who are at a disadvantage,” says **Sara Furguson**. “My goal is to go to Law School and specialize in employment law and help people like myself reach their fullest potential. That includes things like employment discrimination, preventing unnecessary prejudice and raising awareness about



people’s capabilities. My ultimate goal is to become a law professor.”

Furguson was just 3 years old when an automobile accident left her paraplegic. She has used that as grist for her activism and education around disability-related issues. A graduate of Cornell University’s renowned School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Furguson founded the Cornell Disability Service Team, among other campus and community service initiatives, and most recently helped to develop an online certificate

series for CEOs and human resources professionals, developing classes that focus on “disability in the workplace and how employers can integrate and accept into the workplace people with disabilities.”

“The law degree,” she says, “will allow me to educate employers on how they can successfully accept people who are different and have been excluded from some of the things that other people have had the opportunity to do.”

Growing up in Canada, **Sarah Haque** found strong role models, she says, in her mother and other women relatives who had overcome adversity.

“I was raised in a Muslim Pakistani household speaking Urdu, lived in a predominantly Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Montreal, communicated in French at the workplace and with friends, and completed my schooling in English,” she wrote.

Haque brought that diversity of experience to her work at the South Asian Women’s Community Centre in Montreal, where as an intern she helped build a comprehensive business development program to serve low-income immigrant women who needed seed money to start a business. She also created the first microfinance student organization at McGill University, the Student Network for Economic Development.

“A lot of power comes with a law degree,” Haque says. “I want to have that access. I already have some ideas about what I want to study, but mainly I want to explore what’s in the law and what I can do with the tools I’m going to gain.”





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From ages 6 to 18, **Danielle Shaffer** was a competitive figure skater, competing nationwide and becoming the only skater to win the Empire State Games at all levels. As a teenager she got up at 5 a.m. for a pre-school practice session, then practiced for three more hours after school. “As a figure skater, I learned much more than triple jumps,” she wrote in her admission application. “I am grateful for having the thought process of a competitive athlete that is forever embedded in my mind.”

“You learn to push yourself when you’re not very motivated,” Shaffer says, “in those times when you don’t want to step on the ice but you know what your goal is.”

A philosophy major as a UB undergraduate, Shaffer says she decided on law school during her freshman year. “Law is something that basically controls our lives, so being part of that is awesome,” she says. “I’ve always been interested in contracts and the business aspects of sports. But my mind is open: Whatever I really find interesting and enjoy and want to take more of, that’s what I’ll pursue.”

Benjamin Wisniewski got a taste of the legal world as a lieutenant in the Navy, where he served as a command legal officer aboard the USS New Orleans. There he prepared over 150 non-judicial punishment proceedings, working with Judge Advocate General’s Corps and federal prosecutors, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and civilian police. The cases ranged from minor offenses like tardiness to serious crimes like the theft of a large-caliber machine gun.

“Like anything else in life, most of the education happens once you’re on the job,” he says of that experience. “But I’m under no illusion that I know what a lawyer does. My job in the Navy was very much like a prosecutor position, so I have a little bit of experience in the legal field. I also have a background in admiralty law and an interest in environmental law. I’m looking forward to starting law school



and investigating what it has to offer.”

A graduate of Cornell University, where he studied earth and atmospheric science, Wisniewski also served through a military exchange program aboard the HMS Cornwall, a British warship assigned to fight pirates in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin.

Class of 2014 profile

Applicants admitted	37%
Average age	25
Age range	20-57
Age 25+	29%
Women	46%
Men	54%
Ethnic diversity	17%
Students with advanced degrees	6%
Median GPA	3.57
25th GPA percentile	3.36
75th GPA percentile	3.7
Median LSAT	157
25th LSAT percentile	154
75th LSAT percentile	158